

Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) FAQs

1. What does the RFID system do?

RFID systems are comprised of tags and readers. Information is encoded on a rewritable tag, which is comprised of a microchip and antenna that is transmitted to a circulation station via a reader. Unlike barcode readers, RFID systems do not require “line of sight” and as a result between 5 – 10 items can be checked out and the security system deactivated in one action. Therefore, RFID improves the speed and accuracy of circulation functions and inventory control, while providing greater security for library collections. When implemented in conjunction with self-checkout machines and open reserves, libraries report approximately 80% of their circulation transactions as occurring without the need for direct staff assistance. However, patrons will continue to have the option for direct staff support as desired. This self-service model supports the end user, diminishes long wait queues, and improves customer service by allowing existing staff to keep up with service demands arising from increased patron use and circulation.

2. What does RFID add to library procedures that are not currently being done?

RFID expedites library processes and reduces operating costs as follows:

- a) Allows multiple items to be checked in or out in a single transaction (stack processing), which will reduce patron time at check-out and reduce staff time needed to process returns.
- b) Enables patrons to use self-service stations, allowing library staff members to focus on other customer service activities, such as accompanying patrons to the shelves and providing assistance in using the library’s online catalog. 80% of patrons use self-checkout at RFID equipped libraries.
- c) Allows for faster inventory activities such as locating missing items, weeding, general inventory, and locating holds for processing, thereby reducing staff time requirements for these tasks.

3. Does RFID save money? How much will it save each year and when will it pay for itself?

According to a leading vendor, Bibliotheca, the return on investment is typically less than 2 years. RFID will enable CFPL to improve the handling of increased circulation volume. This is especially important now given the expansion of the Fowler Branch Library and the inability to add staff at the desired levels. Materials also tend to turn over faster due to the expedited circulation process, enabling staff members to deliver requested materials to patrons more quickly.

4. How many other Minuteman libraries use the RFID system and how many libraries are in the Minuteman system?

Of the 35 public libraries in the Minuteman Library Network, the following four public libraries use RFID technology: Brookline Public Library, Wellesley Free Library, Cambridge Public Library, and the Goodnow Library (Sudbury).

Other MLN libraries in the planning stages for RFID include Bedford, Natick, and Westwood.

5. How many non-Minuteman libraries use RFID and what is their experience with the system?

Other Massachusetts public libraries currently utilizing RFID include: Milton, Cohasset, Plymouth, Norfolk, Dudley, Mashpee, Chicopee, Worcester, and Falmouth. All have reported that the system has achieved the anticipated benefits.

6. Is RFID necessary or nice?

Since 2000 the Concord Free Public Library’s circulation has increased by 41% without a proportionate increase in staffing. FY2010 circulation statistics exceeded all prior records at 445,904 or 1,250 items per/day. This figure captures outgoing circulation items only. The number of items checked in annually is equally large and reflects the library’s full volume of use. Utilizing technology will help us to manage staff resources better to keep up with service demands, which will result in greater organizational efficiency and an improved customer experience.

Do you have additional questions? Please email us at RFID@concordlibrary.org

